

Historic Contexts for Brigham City

Introduction

Brigham City has a population of approximately 17,000 and is located some 55 miles north of Salt Lake City. Rising abruptly to the east of the town are the Wasatch Mountains, and several miles to the west is the Great Salt Lake. Brigham City is at the northern end of the most densely settled region in the state, the 120-mile long Wasatch Front. It is the largest city in Box Elder County and serves as the county seat. The town was established as an agricultural village by Mormon pioneers in the early 1850s. Its continued growth through the years is reflected in its architecture, which ranges from the vernacular and Victorian styles of the nineteenth century to the bungalows, post-World War II subdivisions, and modern shopping centers of the twentieth.

Brigham City is typical of small-to-mid-size towns in Utah. With the exception of a few dozen mining and railroad towns, virtually all of the cities throughout Utah were established by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon or LDS church). The settlement of these towns was part of the church's attempt to colonize the entire Utah Territory. They had selected Utah as a refuge where they could practice their religion without the conflicts they had faced in the midwest, principally Missouri and Illinois. The Mormons arrived in Utah in the summer of 1847 and immediately founded Great Salt Lake City. Under the direction of church president Brigham Young, they then systematically established some 400 smaller communities throughout the region in the decades that followed, primarily the 1850s and '60s. The twofold purpose of settlement was to accommodate the ever-increasing number of Mormon arrivals, many of whom were recent converts from Great Britain and Scandinavia, and to claim all of the arable land for themselves, thereby keeping non-Mormons from gaining a stronghold in their midst.

Church leaders coordinated the settlement effort. Typically, Brigham Young would "call" or assign a number of men and their families to settle an area that had been previously scouted. He would appoint a leader, often a prominent church official, to direct both the spiritual and temporal affairs of the new settlement. An effort was made to include in the colonizing group men possessing the various skills and experience needed for a successful settlement, e.g. a stone mason, blacksmith, carpenter, miller, etc. The vast majority of Mormon towns were intended simply as agricultural villages. A few colonizing efforts, however, had more specific purposes, such as cotton-raising or iron production, depending on the local resources.

The central planning that went into the Mormon settlement effort produced communities that were very similar in appearance and operation. The square-block grid of the "plat of the City of Zion," a city plan advanced by Mormon church founder Joseph Smith, served as the model for most Utah towns. Churches and public buildings were located near the center of town. Homes were built on town lots which were large enough for gardens, small orchards, barns, and so forth, but not for full-scale farming. The farmland, irrigated by a network of ditches, surrounded the town. This pattern of nucleated settlement, as opposed to scattered farmsteads, encouraged the cooperative, community-building atmosphere church officials favored.

Cooperation was an essential ingredient in the Mormon settlement formula. Teamwork was common in any pioneering effort, but the Mormons integrated that concept into virtually every aspect of their lives. They believed that they were building the Kingdom of God on earth, a spiritual, political, economic, and social kingdom, which, through harmonious cooperation, could become worthy to receive Jesus Christ as its ruler. Cooperation achieved both practical and spiritual goals: local industries were established, canals and ditches completed, buildings constructed, and so forth, and in the process town residents developed stronger bonds of fellowship.

Formal programs of economic cooperation were introduced by church leaders at various times. They ranged from communal arrangements in which all properties were held in common to limited joint-stock enterprises. These were designed to promote the Utopian objectives of the Kingdom and to limit the influence of non-Mormon businessmen who were making inroads in the Utah economy. Economic competition between Mormons and "Gentiles" became a major point of contention in the Utah Territory. Few of the church's cooperative ventures succeeded for any length of time, however. The lure of free enterprise and individual achievement, which church leaders characterized as selfishness, was simply too strong.

Though the Mormon pattern of establishing agrarian communities was the dominant influence on the settlement of Utah, non-Mormon activities also had a significant effect. The arrival of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 and the rapid growth of the mining and livestock industries brought thousands of non-Mormons to the territory. These were major industries that generated unprecedented prosperity and greatly influenced Utah's economy. The U.S. military established encampments, non-Mormon businessmen set up shop in virtually every Mormon community, and a variety of other churches established footholds in the territory. Still, the population of the territory remained predominantly Mormon.

The 1880s and '90s brought changes that moved Mormonism away from some of its Kingdom-of-God goals and toward mainstream American ideals. Conflicts with the federal government and "outsiders" had persisted sporadically since the 1850s, but in the 1880s they increased. Key points of conflict included the separation of church and state, economic competition between Mormons and "Gentiles," communitarian ideals versus personal ambitions, and, most importantly, the Mormon practice of plural marriage. A significant turning point was the Manifesto issued in 1890 by church president Wilford Woodruff denouncing polygamy. Pressure from the federal government threatened dissolution of the church without this concession. The Manifesto also paved the way for Utah statehood in 1896. Instead of seeing themselves as a separate Kingdom of God, Mormons began viewing themselves as Americans.

Utah has moved through the twentieth century much as any other state, though experiencing its own version of national events. It felt the Depression especially hard, relying on federal assistance to a greater extent than most states. Since the 1940s the defense industry has played a major role in the state's economy. Other new industries have flourished, such as recreation and tourism, while some of the older industries, mining and agriculture, for example, have declined in importance.

Brigham City Industrial and Commercial Beginnings, 1854-64

Brigham City was established in the early 1850s by members of the Mormon church. A few families had settled along Box Elder Creek as early as 1851, but it was not until 1854-55 that formal settlement began. In October 1853, Mormon church president Brigham Young assigned Lorenzo Snow, an apostle in the church, to take 50 families with him to settle at Box Elder. A number of the families moved to the area in 1854, though it was not until 1855 that Snow and many of the others actually arrived.

Under Snow's direction a number of important decisions were made that had long-term affects on the community. Snow relocated the settlement on higher ground, had the town plat surveyed, and renamed the community after Brigham Young.¹ By stressing the cooperative ideal, he also convinced those already at the settlement to relinquish their water claims, abandon their existing homes, and rebuild along with the rest of the community. Snow's successful handling of these early issues and his emphasis on cooperation set the pattern that would follow for decades in the community.

During Brigham City's first decade of settlement, industrial and commercial developments were few. Most efforts went toward providing adequate housing and establishing farms--laying out fields, digging canals and ditches, planting and harvesting. Home industries, such as candlemaking, sewing and blacksmithing, were undertaken on an individual basis to provide those necessary products and services. A number of the home industries expanded into small-scale commercial enterprises by the late 1850s and 1860s. Other early businesses included coopering, shoe making, tanning, nail making, and merchandising.

Brigham City's first major industrial enterprise was the Box Elder Flouring Mill, which was built in 1855-56 for Lorenzo Snow. Snow realized that the isolated community could not easily survive without a mill to grind grain into flour and grist for animal feed. Investing partners with Snow in the mill were Brigham Young and Judge Samuel Smith. Snow served as superintendent of the mill, but hired Mads Christian Jensen, an experienced miller, to run the mill. The mill was constructed of local materials by Frederick Kesler, a pioneer builder in the Utah Territory who specialized in mill construction. The Flouring Mill was the first of several water-powered industries that would locate along Box Elder Creek, which ran through the town. A saw mill was also built along the creek in 1856, and later, during the Co-op period, a number of other factories were built. The Flouring Mill is the only remaining building that dates from this initial period of industrial and commercial growth.

¹ Riddle, Mark, *Lorenzo Snow and the Brigham City Cooperative*, MS thesis (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University), pp. 1, 2.

The Co-op: Brigham City Mercantile and Manufacturing Association, 1864-1895

The Brigham City Co-op was an outgrowth of communitarian ideals that had been part of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormon or LDS church) philosophy from its beginning. In Kirtland, Ohio, on February 9, 1831, while the church was still in its first year, church president Joseph Smith instituted the law of consecration requiring the people to turn over to the church any surplus property or possessions for the support of the poor.² The United Order, an economic cooperative system, operated for a time in Kirtland and then was discontinued.³

After the Mormons migrated to Utah from Nauvoo, Illinois, in the 1840s and 50s, church leaders encouraged the settlers in Utah communities to again implement the cooperative system. Part of the reason was to encourage patronage of Mormon enterprises rather than non-Mormon ventures, which were seen as a threat and intrusion in the Mormon settled region. Over 200 cooperatives were established and in operation in Mormon communities between 1868 and 1884 as part of the churchwide effort referred to by historians as the Cooperative Movement. Cooperatives were formed within the local Mormon wards (congregations) for community welfare purposes rather than mere profit. Their methods of operation ranged from businesslike joint-stock corporations to more communal arrangements where members shared everything.⁴ The Brigham City Co-op was an example of the joint-stock approach.

The earliest and most successful Mormon cooperative was in Brigham City. The Brigham City Mercantile and Manufacturing Association was established in 1864 with the formation of a co-op mercantile store.⁵ The organization's name was changed at various times, but it was referred to consistently by the locals as the Co-op.⁶ The Co-op went on to form 40 different departments encompassing commerce, industry, agriculture, horticulture, and construction. At its peak in the late 1870s the Co-op employed most of the available workers in Brigham City, over 500 people. Participants purchased stock in the

² Smith, Joseph, *Doctrine & Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, containing revelations given to Joseph Smith, the Prophet* (Salt Lake City, Utah: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), Section 42, verses 30-32.

³ *Ibid*, Section 104.

⁴ Leonard J. Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 1966), pp. 293, 330.

⁵ Roberts, B. H., *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Century I*, Vol. V (Salt Lake City, Utah: Church Deseret News Press, 1930), p. 217.

⁶ Leonard J. Arrington, "Cooperative Community in the North: Brigham City, Utah," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Summer 1965), pp. 202-203, 208.

cooperative and received dividends in the form of goods and services produced by the various departments. Employees received wages, which were commensurate with similar positions in free-market communities.⁷ The Co-op was managed by a board of directors, a president, secretary, and a general superintendent. Supervisors trained in their respective skills oversaw each of the departments. The entire organization functioned under the umbrella of the church.

Though the Co-op operated until 1895, its first decade and a half were its most successful. A series of misfortunes and setbacks that began in the late 1870s crippled the organization, and it never again attained its former level of success. The demise of the Co-op was brought on by natural disasters, changing attitudes about the role of the Mormon Church in business, legal and financial attacks against the Co-op, and changing hierarchy within the church. One by one, all of Brigham City's cooperative departments were either abandoned or taken over by private interests.

Lorenzo Snow was the driving force behind both the settlement of Brigham City and the establishment of the Co-op. Snow was appointed to the church's governing body, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, in 1849, served a mission to Italy and Switzerland in 1850-51, was elected to the territorial legislature in 1852 (where he served for 30 years), and in 1853 was assigned to direct the settlement of what would become Brigham City. His success with the Brigham City Co-op, which he established in 1864, and his continued service to the Mormon church resulted in his being called to serve as president of the church on September 13, 1898. He served in that capacity until his death three years later.⁸

Snow was intrigued by the concept of "cooperation" from his earliest days with the Mormon church. He had been deeply touched by his early conversations with the founder of Mormonism, Joseph Smith. In particular, Snow had come to believe in the concept of the United Order of Enoch. This order was a belief fostered by Smith that Jesus Christ would not return until a cooperative society had been established on earth. This society needed to be independent, relying only on itself to provide for all temporal and spiritual needs. Members of the order would work for the good of all and not personal gain. This was one of the motivating principles that Snow carried with him throughout his life.

The Brigham City Co-op grew steadily from its inception in 1864. The mercantile, the first cooperative venture, was followed by the first industry, a tannery, built in 1866. It was one of several industrial facilities constructed along Box Elder Creek to take advantage of the water power. The tannery was expanded in 1870 to include a boot and shoe shop, which grew to occupy its own building in 1877. That new two-story building also housed the

⁷ Arrington, "Cooperative Community," p. 207.

⁸ Dumas Malone, *Dictionary of American Biography*, vol. 17 (New York: Charles Scribner and Sons, 1935), pp. 386-387.

harness and hat departments and a brush factory.⁹ Lorenzo Snow's 1855 flour mill, though actually constructed before the Co-op was established, was apparently incorporated into the cooperative at an early date as well. Two other important industries were the woolen mill, constructed in 1869-70, and the planing mill, built c.1876. The woolen mill was destroyed by fire on December 21, 1877, then was rebuilt in 1878. The fire was one of several financial disasters which eventually brought about the demise of the Co-op and caused the industries to close down.

A number of other cooperative ventures were initiated in the 1870s. In 1871, the Co-op established a sheep herd, a farm, and a dairy. Between November 1873 and August 1875, several new departments were added: a harness shop, saw and carpentry departments, a hat department, a saw mill, two more farms, brick and adobe yards, and a masons' and plasterers' department. A list of Co-op departments appeared in the July 4, 1875, Deseret News as follows: "Mercantile, Tannery, Boot and Shoe, Harness good, Woolen Mill, Tailor, Hattery, Rope-making, Silk, Painting, Coopers, Pottery, Farmers, Millinery, Braiding, Artificial Flowers, Lady's Fancy work, Butchers, Blacksmithing, Wagons, Cabinet work, Carpenters, Brooms, Lumber and Shingles, Bricks, Adobes, Masons and Plasterers, and Cattle and Sheep."¹⁰

The year 1878 brought disaster to the Co-op. In July, the U.S. Assessor and Collector of Internal Revenue levied a tax on the cooperative for their use of scrip. The Co-op was forced to borrow the \$10,200 needed to pay this obligation. This was not the only loss that year. Other losses included the following: "crops destroyed by grasshoppers, \$4000.00; crops destroyed by drought, \$3000.00; burning of woolen mill, \$30,000.00; loss in Idaho, \$6000.00; by assessment, \$10,000.00; total \$53,200.00."¹¹ These losses crippled the Co-op and forced it to close one department after another. Many of the former department heads purchased the properties and successfully operated them as private ventures. Only the mercantile department continued in operation after this disastrous year. In 1883, the federal government returned over \$7000 of the tax levies taken from the Co-op in 1878. This money helped pay some of the debts incurred through losses in Idaho that year.

The majority of these funds laid the foundation for the last venture of the Co-op, the new Mercantile Store constructed in 1890-91. This building represents the confidence the Co-op leaders had that the mercantile would continue to succeed even after the failure of all of the other departments. Completed January 20, 1891, the store opened for business the following month. The store was hurt by the depression of 1893 and competition from the many private businesses which had started in Brigham City. These combined to make the store less successful than the Co-op had hoped. A fire broke out in the store on December 19, 1894, and the mercantile business never fully recovered

⁹ Neilsen, Vaughn J., *The History of Box Elder Stake* (Brigham City, Utah: Pat's Print Shop, 1977), pp. 57, 58.

¹⁰ Quoted in Riddle, *Lorenzo Snow*, pp. 12, 13.

¹¹ Quoted in Arrington, "Cooperative Community," p. 216.

from the resulting financial losses. The mercantile store went bankrupt, and the Brigham City Mercantile and Manufacturing Association went into receivership on November 30, 1895, ending the cooperative movement in Brigham City.¹²

The Brigham City Cooperative movement was widely recognized for its high level of success. Edward Bellamy reportedly came to Brigham City in 1886 to observe the system and to talk to Lorenzo Snow about the venture.¹³ Mormon church official B. H. Roberts wrote that Lorenzo Snow brought "community interest to its highest achievement in Utah."¹⁴ Historian Edward W. Tullidge said, "We believe that had Brigham Young and his compeers when they first settled in Utah attempted what Lorenzo Snow actually accomplished in Brigham City, a hundred genuine cooperative communities would have sprung up in Utah."¹⁵

¹² Arrington, "Cooperative Community," p. 217.

¹³ Ibid., p. 199.

¹⁴ Roberts, B. H., *Comprehensive History of the Church: The First Century*, Vol. V (Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Press, 1930), p. 217.

¹⁵ Tullidge, Edward, *Tullidge's Quarterly Magazine*, Vol. II, p. 304.

Private Commercial and Industrial Development, 1880s-1930s

The disastrous losses suffered by the Co-op in 1878--brought on by fire, drought, grasshopper infestation, and federal tax levies--reduced the organization's viability and opened the door for the reemergence of private enterprise in Brigham City. Up to that time Mormon church leaders had advised the people to patronize the church-sponsored Co-op instead of private industries, which were often run by non-Mormons. After 1878, however, Lorenzo Snow lifted the sanction on private enterprise and a number of small businesses sprang up.

The first private business was established on Main Street in 1882 or 1883. It was a lumber and hardware business operated by Charles Squires and John H. Forsgren. Other businesses followed and by the late 1880s commercial enterprises could be found on both sides of Main Street.¹⁶

The growth in private enterprise in the community is indicated by the number of business establishments listed in the Utah state gazetteers from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The 1879-80 gazetteer noted that, "There are many industries in operation in Brigham City, all of which are conducted on the co-operative plan." By 1888, however, 43 private enterprises were listed, and little mention was made of the Co-op. In 1900 over 175 businesses were listed in the gazetteer, and by 1928 there were over 350.¹⁷

A significant trend in the 1880s and '90s was the conversion of Co-op industries and facilities into private enterprises. In some cases, such as the Planing Mill and Flouring Mill, the facilities sat idle during much of the 1880s before being sold to private concerns. The Planing Mill was purchased in 1892 by John Merrell, a former employee at the mill, and reopened as the Merrell Planing Mill. The Flouring Mill was sold in 1892 to John Bott, who converted it into a monument factory. Both buildings are still owned by members of those families and are still being used for essentially those same purposes. The Woolen Mill, which continued in operation as a Co-op industry until December 1891, was purchased by some of the shareholders in 1892 and reopened under the operation of James Baron, a former employee. That business is still in operation as the Baron Woolen Mills. The Co-op Mercantile Store, which operated only from 1891 until 1895, was sold and converted into a bank in 1901. A number of other Co-op businesses were also privatized, but none of those facilities remain standing today.

Conversion of Co-op businesses to private use usually necessitated alterations to the buildings, especially as the businesses expanded over the years. In the case of the Woolen Mills, substantial additions were being made to the building as late as 1949. The Planing Mill and the Flouring Mill have

¹⁶ Lydia Walker Forsgren, ed., *History of Box Elder County*, (Brigham City, Utah: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1947) p. 119.

¹⁷ *Utah Gazetteer*, 1874, 1879-80, 1888, 1892-93, 1900, 1928, available at Utah State Historical Society Library.

also had additions built on to them, but their original features are still clearly recognizable. The Mercantile Store has remained virtually unaltered.

In addition to the privatization of Co-op industries, many new businesses were established in Brigham City during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many were small retail and service shops typical of most small towns of the period--clothiers, mercantile stores, restaurants, hotels, theatres, drug stores, etc. Large-scale agricultural ventures also had a significant effect of the town's economy. The sugar beet and fruit industries were of particular importance. Sugar beet planting began in 1901 and in 1916 Utah-Idaho Sugar Company built a factory in Brigham City. Fruit growing was undertaken on a large scale beginning in the 1890s. Knudson Brothers Fruit and Produce Company, established in 1892, was one of the major operations. The Brigham City Canning Company was organized in 1903, the annual Peach Days festival was started in 1904, and the Brigham City Fruit Growers Association was established in 1908. Livestock and poultry raising were also important industries that boosted the local economy during this period.¹⁸

Concurrent with the emergence of private commercial and industrial enterprises was the development of many civic improvements: telephones were installed in 1889, a water system in 1892, an electric power plant in 1890-91, and a fire department in 1892.¹⁹ These improvements helped foster the growth of the Brigham City as the principal city and county seat of Box Elder County.

Business development continued in Brigham City until the Depression of the 1930s. The lull of the 1930s ended only with the onset of World War II, which brought on new developments, such as the construction of the Bushnell Military Hospital south of town.

Most of the existing commercial buildings in the central business district were constructed during the 1880s to 1930s period. Approximately 15 of them still retain their integrity and are eligible for National Register designation because of their association with this significant period of growth in the community.

¹⁸ Forsgren, *History of Box Elder County*, pp. 53, 70-71, 93.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 37-38, 265-267.

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